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SOME ERRORS OF MANAGEMENT

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N engineering there are errors due to deviation from facts and errors due to misplaced and immature judgment. In design and construction most mistakes are those relating to facts and materials. Since engineering is the art of organizing and directing men, as well as controlling the forces and materials of nature, errors in management divisions are largely in personnel control.

In enumerating some errors of management I am setting forth, in what follows, impressions gained during ten years of practical engineering experience. Although the errors as I saw them might have been regarded by some as simply personal opinions, nevertheless I have observed in recent years that men in management are beginning to recognize that they are not infallible and that their responsibilities demand the highest possible efficiency, that is, a minimum of errors.

1. One of my first contacts with errors in management was in a shop having such poor lighting conditions that many of us were compelled to use sperm candles constantly. These candles not only served a poor purpose in quality and quantity production, but, since they were used as missiles by some not overly intent upon their work, they also interfered with the peace of mind and work of many. As a running mate to the candle was the wash bucket sitting on the floor. This piece of equipment, with its water contents, and the soap and towel furnished by the individual, provided the one connecting link between industrial darkness and natural living conditions. To enjoy this "fixture" alone was similar to being the only occupant in a Pullman section. To share with others was the custom, the value of which was its helpfulness in maintaining a feeling of comradeship. Modern industry is now advancing most rapidly in the direction of pleasing and healthful surroundings. Industrial organizations now realize that it is economical to do so. This point is very strikingly illustrated by a statement made by Mr. Luckiesh, director of the lighting research laboratories of the National Lamp Works of Cleveland, to the effect that the annual production of American factories alone could be increased in value \$2,500,000,000 by improved lighting.

2. The discharging of an employee upon first offense is usually unwarranted. Oftentimes the circumstance responsible for the employee's error is not known. Sometimes it is trouble or sickness at home. Sometimes the character of the work is out of harmony with the makeup of the individual. Not long ago at one of the industries in Columbus an employee was temporarily discharged because his work was very unsatisfactory in the particular department to which he had been assigned. Upon reinstatement an experiment was tried by placing him in another department. The report soon came back that was "no good." Another department was tried and an adverse report was soon received. One more

trial in a third department was made. After a time the report came back that he was one of the best men in that department.

3. The "calling down" or criticising of the superintendent or of the foreman in the presence of his men is inexcusable. If it is not deserved, the wrong is then a double one. If it is deserved, the men who are not acquainted with the circumstances and are loyal to their leader will resent the action and loss of production and disloyalty to the company will follow. To discharge the superintendent without very good and sufficient reasons invites discontent, lowers production for the immediate future and causes financial loss. A case of this kind with which I was familiar caused a loss to a large company of many thousands of dollars. This costly error was the result of improper attitude and poor judgment on the part of the personnel manager. In this particular instance the superintendent discharged now holds a much higher position and the superior who was responsible was requested to resign some time later.

4. The theory that the driving or "crack the whip" method produces results is grossly in error. Management cannot secure the best results where the "slave driving" system is in vogue. Such a system may have been used effectively in the past and may work with certain classes of labor, but today such classes are few. The fundamental principle for which men in management should stand is that their organization, even down to the office boy and janitor, works with them and not for them.

5. Men in management with suspicious dispositions have only to show the slightest signs of suspicion in order to destroy the confidence of the educated men in their employ. To indicate in any way that there is not the fullest confidence on the part of such a superior destroys loyalty in his subordinates.

6. Tactless methods employed in dealing with technically educated men results only in inefficiency. The average technical men, just out of college and possibly away from home for the first time, is a very high strung, sensitive individual. His contact with the world is just beginning and consequently he has not yet passed through the stage of "hard knocks" and is not fully equipped to withstand without a shock a thoughtless blast of tactlessness. I can well recall how in times past, the quality and quantity of my efforts were greatly reduced, for hours and sometimes days, by the tactless error of a superior.

7. Sometimes an executive makes an error by generously overlooking a mistake made by a subordinate. He takes the position that the mistake was unavoidable and cannot be helped by censure. He assumes that the lesson has been taught and that the subordinate will not repeat the mistake. This executive's position may be right in some cases, but sometimes the mistake of the subordi-

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nate is one of judgment of which he is ignorant, unless his attention has been specifically directed to it. If an executive is to build up an efficient organization and be fair to his subordinates, mistakes, as well as meritorious acts, should be pointed out.

8. When the executive closes his eyes to questionable methods in his organization, feigns ignorance and seems to take the position that results must be obtained regardless of consequences, he is flirting with disaster. Such attitude will ultimately lower the efficiency of a concern and men who are responsible for decreased efficiency are not in great demand.

9. I never have been able to understand the policy of hiding methods of production which prevail in some industries. If competing industries are of about the same capacities, they can increase their efficiency and reduce their costs by pooling their problems. The large plant need have no fear of the small one, which, upon learning some of its methods, may profit by the experience of the "big brother." It stands to reason that the small plant cannot seriously compete with the larger one. For management to attempt to keep hidden the activities of their company seems to be a short-sighted policy. Some go so far as not even permitting engineering students to visit their plants for fear they may in some way convey to their competitors some valuable methods. They do not seem to realize that if a competitor is determined to obtain information, it is almost impossible to prevent him from doing so. Some time ago an official of a large manufacturing plant in a neighboring city reported that they were having much trouble in their factory, and they at once took up the matter with their strongest competitor. For weeks there was the closest co-operation. Visits were made back and forth between the plants, each party intent on solving the problem, the solution of which guaranteed increased efficiency for each.

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10. A very serious error is sometimes made by the executive of a utility company having in his organization an individual who is unscrupulous and untrustworthy. It will take many years for a utility company to counteract a reputation built up by unreliable employees. Of all enterprises, the utility companies stand closer to the people generally than any others; therefore, in view of this contact and their responsibility to the public, it is incumbent upon them to have in their employ only those of the highest character.

11. The executive who places so high a value upon his own capabilities that he is unwilling to share responsibility and to pass on to subordinates duties which can be efficiently performed by them, is an executive in name only. He is unfair to his faithful and ambitious subordinates; he can only hope to retain his superior position in that kind of an organization where seniority is based upon length of service and not necessarily merit. The executive who is always conscious of the abilities of his subordinates and who will actually pass on to them responsibilities is approaching the highest possible efficiency.

Recent investigations in the industries of this country have shown that of the enormous losses due to management and labor a very large percentage is directly chargeable to management. Engineering graduates are being trained for management and, therefore, they must face this charge and shoulder the responsibility. Their success will largely rest upon their ability to profit by the errors of others and upon their desire to guard against those qualities of management which are productive of loss and inefficiency.
